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Pushing Mind to the Limits: Visual Forms in Dharmadāsa's *Vidadghamukhamāṇḍana**

SUMMARY: People have always tried to master memorizing—a factor playing an immense role in the circulation of Indian literature. To commit to memory seemed to be one of the characteristics of educated people, the source of knowledge and respect. Literary riddles were a great tool for shaping and sharpening the mind. As multi-leveled exercises they engage different parts of the brain in the process of memorizing. Dharmadāsa's work, *Vidadghamukhamāṇḍana*, “The Ornament of the Wise Man's Mouth” (ca. 11th century), served as a manual helping to enhance cognitive skills. *Bandhas*, visual forms included in *Vidadghamukhamāṇḍana* combined with other literary riddles, create complex enigmas, pushing minds to the limits and forcing those who accept the challenge to unveil multiple layers, denotations

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The following article is an extended version of selected passages from one of the chapters (*Rozrywka i nauka. Formy typu bandha w zbiorach zagadek literackich*: ‘The entertainment and the education. Bandha type forms in the literary riddles’ compendia’) of the author's PhD dissertation. The unpublished thesis entitled *Sanskrycka poezja figuratywna: Teoria i praktyka na przykładzie citrabandha* (‘Sanskrit figurative poetry: The theory and practice based on the example of citrabandha’) has been devoted to the topic of *citrakavya*; its origins, systematization and structure, as well as its implementation in the field of Indian poetry and modern literary practice.

and connotations in the text. The readers/listeners stretch their abilities to solve the riddles set by the author, who has crossed the boundaries of poetical compositions and rules concerning the creation of visual forms in Sanskrit literature. *Bandhas* of this kind play an important role in the history and development of Indian visual poetry. Their unique character and function allow us to distinguish a coherent trend in the tradition of Sanskrit *citrakāvya*.

KEYWORDS: *citrakāvya*, *citrabandha*, Dharmadāsa, visual poetry, riddles

Speaking of boundaries, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the scope of *citrakāvya*, Sanskrit figurative poetry, is not very clear. Developing gradually over the centuries, this literary tradition has never been homogeneous. Although nowadays it is known as *citrakāvya*, it is worth noting that this term refers to a plethora of literary figures and phenomena, which in its origins were often known by other names and were treated separately. The reason why the term *citra* became prevalent seems to be obvious. ‘Figurative poetry’ is only one of many meanings of this literary tradition’s name. It can be translated also as ‘pictorial poetry’, ‘visual poetry’ or ‘entertaining poetry’ since *citra* means not only an image but also something conspicuous, manifold, causing surprise or simply a riddle.¹ The term describes literary forms put together because of their basis in a ‘word play’. As Edwin Gerow points out, it “refers to the composition of various puzzles and games, riddles and conundrums and the like” (Gerow 1971: 175). Thus, in this tradition one can find very simple figurative formations (such as various kinds of alliteration), more complex figures (like palindromes or poetical equivalents of a magic square) and very complex forms called *bandha* or *citrabandha*,² which are the most

¹ More about *citrakāvya* and various forms within the scope of this kind of poetry in Cielas 2016; Gerow 1971: 175–190; Jha 1975 and Tubb 2014.

² According to the classification of figures within *citrakāvya* proposed by Siegfried Lienhard, poetical equivalents of a magic square called *sarvatobhadras* can be distinguished within the scope of *bandhas* in their early geometrical form, which later on evolved into a more complex set of figures composed on the basis of pictures resembling shapes of well-known objects (Lienhard 2007: 174). Therefore,

similar to figurative poems known from European literatures, for example Ancient Greek *technopaignia* or Latin *carmina figurata*.³ Understanding *citra* as something causing surprise without the indication of a visual element allows to classify also literary riddles deprived of a pictorial factor within the *citrakāvya* genre. For this reason even Sanskrit literary theorists could not agree on a coherent scope of *citrakāvya*. Their views differ in terms of systematization and terminology within the tradition.⁴ Regardless of differences, most of them speak about forms where a visual element plays a prominent role. Under the term *bandha* Gerow defines them as verses “which can be arranged, in terms of certain significant repeated syllables, in a visual form of natural objects, such as swords, wheels, axes, etc.” (Gerow 1971: 186). Generally, it is a term describing various compositional patterns and pictorial designs in poetry.

Although the scope of visual poetry in Sanskrit is not entirely clear, the rules governing the composition of specific *bandha* figures are very strict. In this field there was either no space for poetic imagination and freedom or it was limited, especially ca. 9th–10th century. As can be judged based on the works on Sanskrit theory of literature of

sarvatobhadras represent an important step in the development of Sanskrit visual poetry, embodying the transition from simple word plays to the poetical figures containing meaningful pictorial component.

³ More about the tradition of visual poetry in European literatures in Higgins 1986, Higgins 1987 and Rypson 2002.

⁴ Although the classifications and terminology within *citrakāvya* stays beyond the scope of the present article, it is worth mentioning that subsequent theoreticians used various names for the enumeration and description of similar or the same figures within the tradition. Along *citra* and *bandha* such terms as *krīḍa* (‘play’), *duṣkara* (‘difficult to accomplish’), *gati* (‘gait’, ‘motion’) or *ākāra* (‘shape’) can be found. Furthermore, some of the theoreticians classified visual compositions among *alamkāras*, poetic embellishments (that was the view represented for example by Daṇḍin, Rudraṭa, Hemacandra or Bhoja), others perceived it as one of many kinds of poetry (to mention only Jagannātha or Appaya Dīkṣita), while a group of authors, including for example Ānandavardhana and Maṃmaṭa, described it both in reference to figures of speech and types of poetical composition.

that time, it seems that something what could be called ‘the canon of *bandhas*’ has been already established and legitimized by the power of various theoreticians, who described mostly the same compositional patterns within visual poetry, often using the same examples as their predecessors.⁵ A well-composed stanza containing a *bandha* form was a stanza written according to the guidelines given by normative texts. The main criterion was matching the pattern, which made *citrakāvya* relatively uniform. Due to the same matrix visual stanzas in Sanskrit often duplicate the prevailing scheme, which makes a vast number of them similar to one another. On the other hand, the creativity of Sanskrit poets led to the emergence of plenty of forms and patterns, which made this kind of literature vivid and interesting despite its limitations in terms of formalization. Composing new *bandhas* allowed authors to cross the borders of normative circles—an unfamiliar pattern was not burdened by theoreticians’ specifications so its creator was able to set the rules on his own and show his ingenuity. In the course of time, as a result of poetical activity, the number of *bandhas* increased rapidly. But it was not the only field within the *citrakāvya* tradition in which authors were searching for the opportunity to demonstrate their originality and poetical skillfulness. Masterful composition of complex riddles meeting the criteria of *bandhas* formation, joining the semantic, visual and sonic layers of the text in a harmonious way as well as not violating theoreticians’ rules governing the creation of ideal *kāvya* but responding to their expectations were the objectives that poets tried to fulfill, unless visual stanzas in the text were meant to have a

⁵ Successive theoreticians sought to obtain a coherent and original summation of the tackled phenomenon, usually by changes within its division and terminology. Nevertheless, the essence of their description mostly remained the same. In this way for example Hemacandra followed the steps and quoted Rudraṭa and Ānandavardhana, who have been borrowed from also by Mammaṭa. In the work of Ruyyaka striking similarities to the latter’s discourse on visual poetry can be found. The tradition has been continued for example by Viśvanātha, who followed the steps of Mammaṭa and Ruyyaka, etc.

a purpose other than enriching the meaning of the work and contributing to the incitement of ultimate aesthetic experience.

Texts containing *bandhas* can be divided roughly into three categories: didactic literature and collections of literary games; narrative literature (the great example are visual stanzas adorning selected chapters of *mahākāvya*s) and laudatory poetry. The suggested division is based on a few major factors. Texts containing *bandha* figures differ in terms of the selection of forms, the level of their difficulty, their artistic value and, above all, their function. Didactic literature and collections of literary games fall within the first category. Although the collections of riddles seem to be designed solely for the purpose of entertainment, they are also a great tool for shaping and sharpening the mind. As multi-leveled exercises literary riddles engage different parts of the brain, helping to enhance cognitive skills. One of the tools exploited by the authors of such compositions were elements of visual poetry, often combined with other puzzles in order to create complex enigmas. Texts of this kind show a full range of possible visual formations in literature, usually with a high degree of difficulty but a lower level of artistic value than in the case of two other above-mentioned types of texts containing *bandhas*.

One of the examples of compendia in question is the *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana*, “The Ornament of the Wise Man’s Mouth”, a collection of riddles written by Dharmadāsa, also known as Dharmadāsaśūri, probably a Buddhist poet who lived ca. 11th century (Sternbach 1975: 95).⁶ The popularity and dissemination of the work are evinced by the fact that its portions have been quoted later in numerous texts, such as Śārngadhara’s *Paddhati*⁷ and *Buddhavaktramaṇḍana* by Kīka or

⁶ Since the dating of Dharmadāsa’s life and activity is far from certain, according to Lienhard it is better to assume that he lived between the 6th century and the first half of the 11th century (Lienhard 1984: 154). Although the author of *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana* is usually described as a Buddhist, sometimes he is referred to as a Jaina. See for example Sternbach 1975: 94.

⁷ According to Sternbach the work has been compiled in 1363 (Sternbach 1974: 17).

inspired various authors.⁸ The composition of literary riddles and compilation of works containing them was particularly wide-spread among Jains. According to Lienhard's opinion, it could be caused by "the immense popularity of riddles in Jaina circles (...) probably connected with the predilection of Jaina scholars for teaching the faith by catechism" (Lienhard 1984: 154). Furthermore, it can be stated that well-developed memory was of great importance for Buddhists and Jains, who defended and popularized their views in debates. The works containing various word plays and riddles had, therefore, a particular aim. The *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana*, for instance, is not just a compilation of puzzles but rather a specialized manual focusing on the knowledge of riddles. One can find there detailed enumerations of various kinds of enigmas along with the methods of their composition and illustrative examples. The main purpose of the *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana* was expressed not only in the title of the work but also at the beginning of the text, where Dharmadāsa compares it to the betel leaves received at the entrance of the hall and emphasizes the fact that it is useful for those who want to take part in learned assemblies:⁹

yady asti sabhāmadhye sthātum vaktum manas tadā sudhiyaḥ |
tāmbūlam iva gṛhītvā vidagdhamukhamaṇḍanaṃ viśata || VMM 1.8

If [your] thought focuses on standing firmly and speaking in the assembly, then,
 Oh Wise Men, seize "The Ornament of the Wise Man's Mouth" as betel and step in!

The *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana*'s aim was to prepare for a scholarly debate those who wanted to take part in an assembly of literati and prove themselves as intelligent and knowledgeable. In four chapters of the work, 272 stanzas in total, various kinds of literary riddles were

⁸ One of the poets highly influenced by Dharmadāsa's work was Viśveśvara-bhaṭṭa. His late, composed in the first half of the 18th century, *Kavīndrakarṇabhāraṇa* is often referred to as an imitation of *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana* (Sternbach 1975: 98).

⁹ All the translations quoted in the article are by its author.

introduced. Visual forms were placed in the third chapter. Nevertheless, *bandhas* were mentioned already in the first chapter, where the author enumerates tackled figures. Among visual formations described in the *Vidagdhamukhamāṇḍana* one can find the shapes of a wheel, lotus flower, crow's foot, zig-zag, literary magic square, palindromes, chain/necklace and snake's coils.¹⁰ Moreover, the last two figures were separated from the rest by the examples of so-called *vardhamānākṣaras* and *hīyamānākṣaras*—the one of 'increasing syllables' and of 'lessening syllables'. Contrary to previous forms, similarly to *citrasaṃsuddha*¹¹ mentioned after the riddles containing the snake's coil pattern, they do not comprise any particular picture.

There is nothing strange about the selection of figures depicted in the *Vidagdhamukhamāṇḍana* but the structure of visual stanzas created by Dharmadāsa requires more attention.¹² One of the factors which allowed the author to modify well-known patterns, not only in terms of the position of particular syllables in the text but on a much bigger scale, was the unique characteristic of Sanskrit visual poetry assuming that the pictorial side of the poem is not indicated directly. The visual form is hidden in the text and has to be decoded and possibly rewritten in a particular shape by its reader or listener.¹³ Such

¹⁰ VMM 1.13bc–15ab: (...) *cakraṃ padmaṃ kākapadaṃ tathā || gomūtrīm sarvatobhadraṃ gatapratyāgataṃ bahu |* (...) *śṛṅkhalāṃ nāgapāśaṃ ca* (...) |

¹¹ The figure—although its name contains the word *citra*, which can suggest a connotation with visual poetry—does not contain any pictorial element and, therefore, stays beyond the scope of the present article.

¹² Although Dharmadāsa exploits less popular—especially at the time of the work—forms of chain/necklace and snake's coils, they were not unusual. Also the order of presented figures seems to be accidental. They are not arranged according to the degree of difficulty, from the easiest to the most complex, as it generally takes place in compendia of riddles.

¹³ It is not justified whether *bandha* compositions were supposed to be read only. Probably texts including elements of visual poetry were also transmitted in the oral form. As suggested by the contemporary Sanskrit poets composing *citra-bandhas*, a person proficient in the rules concerning the creation of visual stanzas, fluent in prosody and Sanskrit, is able to recognize the picture hidden in a text by hearing.

a feature permits interference in the structure of the text as far as certain modifications lead to the point in which the visual layer is possible to be distinguished. Furthermore, since eliciting aesthetic experience was not the main aim of Dharmadāsa, he could act more freely in terms of the form. Obviously, changes made by the author increased the level of difficulty of proposed riddles. Since the creation of multi-leveled and complicated puzzles was the main purpose here, these changes were justified. Nevertheless, in many cases Dharmadāsa's modifications influenced the visual layer of the text and caused violation of systematized rules governing the composition of *bandhas*.

Traditionally, depending on a pattern, composing a *bandha* requires the use of one or more stanzas because the number of syllables and their arrangement are crucial for the creation of an image. Dharmadāsa plays with this assumption. The author often lengthens the way leading towards solving a *bandha* and piles up obstacles, adds puzzles preceding the decoding of the ultimate visual form. Dharmadāsa does not follow the rule stating that a stanza or a group of stanzas is a carrier/building matter of a *bandha* either. The very first visual figure occurring in *Vidagdhamukhamanḍana* has not signaled such profound changes yet—here, in accordance with the 'canonical' *bandhas*, an image has been hidden in a complete stanza. On the other hand, one added element makes this example unconventional:

It means that the visual layer of the text did not have to be necessarily drawn on a piece of paper—it was enough that the awareness of the occurrence of a particular *bandha* in a stanza created its mental image, which influenced the thorough understanding of the composition. Moreover, the recognition of *citrabandhas* was an entertainment for wise, intelligent people who had specialized knowledge of those forms. It served as a code covering the additional meaning accessible only for insiders. It would also explain the reason why visual poems in Sanskrit were not written in the form of particular shapes in the first place but were hidden in a continuous text. Although illustrated manuscripts containing visualizations of *bandhas* do exist, they are definitely in minority. Furthermore, the ones in which the pictorial layer is depicted were mostly didactic in its nature and showing the mechanism of *citrabandhas* was one of their purposes.

it is combined with *praśnottara* (question-answer figure).¹⁴ This compositional solution will be exploited by the author also in the subsequent riddles. Dharmadāsa's first puzzle containing a *bandha* is composed of twenty questions, which have to be answered in order to solve the enigma:

*kaṃ caurasya cchinatti kṣitipatir anaghaḥ kiṃ padaṃ vakti kutsāṃ
kṣeṇīsaṃbodhanaṃ kiṃ vadati kamalabhūḥ kā ca viśvaṃ bibhati |
cakrāṅgāmantraṇaṃ kiṃ katham api sujanaḥ kiṃ na kuryād anāryaṃ
kīdr̥g bhoktuḥ puraṃ syāt payasi vada kuto mīnapaṅkti bibheti ||
kīm svacchaṃ śāradaṃ syād vadati vṛṣagatiḥ ko 'mśumālī pavitraḥ
kvo 'smin kiṃ jīvanaṃ kām viracayati kavir vahnisaṃbodhanaṃ kiṃ |
nākāṅkṣanti striyaḥ kaṃ tanur asuraripoḥ kīdr̥śī kaś ca mūkaḥ
saṃyak prītitaḍāgaḥ priyatama tanute kīdr̥śaḥ kīdr̥śas te || VMM
3.11–12*

1. What does a sinless king cut off from a thief? 2. What syllable proclaims contempt? 3. What is the vocative for the Earth? 4. How to address the One Rising out of a Lotus? 5. And the one that sustains the universe? 6. How is a part of the wheel called? 7. What dishonourable thing would a righteous man never do? 8. What should be the city of an administrator like? 9. Tell [me], what a school of fish is afraid of in the water? 10. What would be pure in the autumn? 11. How to address the One Who Rides a Bull? 12. Who is the One with a Garland of Rays? 13. What is *pavitra*? 14. What is life in this world? 15. What does the poet create? 16. How is Agni called? 17. What do women not want? 18. What is the body of the Enemy of Demons like? 19. What is like a mute person? And completely, [my] love! 20. What is like and what does it cover your most beloved lake?

¹⁴ *Praśnottara* is a kind of conundrum, a pun in which usually one word or phrase answers several questions (see e.g. Gerow 1971: 185). The occurrence of a question-answer puzzle in Dharmadāsa's work is not surprising. This form of a riddle is probably one of the most popular word games in Indian culture. It has been widely used during the assemblies of poets (*kavigoṣṭhi*), where the adepts of literary art outdo each other in the fulfillment of mutually given tasks.

The author addresses a specific person—in this case someone closely related, referred to as *prīti*, ‘beloved’—to whom he directs his questions. This is the reason why the text is filled up with imperative forms of verbs, such as *vada*—‘tell [me]’ or *brūhi*—‘explain’, which are characteristic also of the other compendia of riddles, linking them with the oral tradition and directly referring to the challenge of solving the conundrums. The nineteen subsequent questions from the above verses require one-word answers, which joined together create a new stanza—the answer to the final question. The questions are not thematically coherent—they belong to various fields. The most common seem to be questions about vocative forms of nouns.¹⁵ The nineteen consecutive answers are:¹⁶ 1. *karam* (a hand), 2. *ku* (bad), 3. *ko* (oh Earth!), 4. *ka* (oh Brahmā!), 5. *kuḥ* (the Earth), 6. *ara* (oh spoke!), 7. *kalaham* (an argument), 8. *sakaram* (bearing taxes), 9. *vittam* (of being caught), 10. *saras* (a pond), 11. *aja* (oh Śiva!), 12. *kaḥ* (the Sun), 13. *amala* (a purity), 14. *ad* (a food), 15. *gā* (a song), 16. *ra* (oh Fire!), 17. *nīrasam* (a lack of passion), 18. *saktamā* (joined with Lakṣmī), 19. *arutaḥ* (voiceless). Joining the answers together¹⁷ results in the stanza depicting the lake mentioned in the twentieth question:¹⁸

¹⁵ All of the questions starting from ‘what is the vocative...?’, ‘how to address...?’, ‘how is...called?’ require answers in the form of the vocative case of one of the synonyms of the words mentioned. In the text one can find also other questions related to Sanskrit grammar, for example asking about a prefix denoting something wrong, negative (second question in the above example). In this way a queried person has an occasion to show his/her knowledge in the field of Sanskrit grammar and lexicography.

¹⁶ Since the conundrums from the *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana* are often quite difficult to solve, the text has been commented upon many times. The commentators suggested the right answers and solutions, which help to decipher *praśnottaras* included in the third chapter of the work. For more information concerning the commentaries to the *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana*, please consult Sternbach 1975: 95–96.

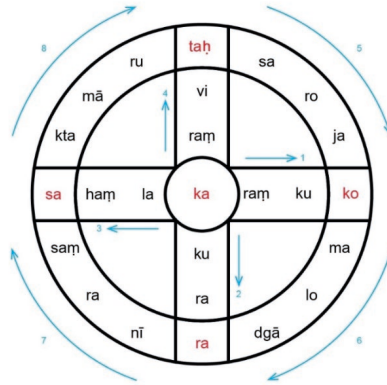
¹⁷ Successive words join together according to the *saṁdhi* rules but the regulations governing the occurrence of *avagrāha* have not been taken into consideration.

¹⁸ Although the stanza constituting an answer to the last question should arise from the combination of the answers to the previous nineteen conundrums without any additional changes, in this passage one encounters several inaccuracies. Despite

karaṃkukokakurarakalahamsakaraṃbitaḥ |
sarojakomalodgāranīrasaṃsaktamārutah ||

Of the air saturated with nectar coming out of delicate lotuses,
 disturbed by black geese (*kalahaṃsa*), ospreys (*kurara*), cuckoos
 (*koka*) and *karaṃkus*.¹⁹

Finally, this stanza contains an image of the *caturaracakrabandha*—
 the four spokes wheel pattern.²⁰



the fact that the answer to the ninth question is *vittam* in the stanza it occurs as *bitaḥ*. The alternation *v/b* is quite frequent in Sanskrit, since *v* is pronounced bilabially. The interchange between *m* and *visarga* or *anusvāra* is also not surprising in visual poetry. Both *visarga* and *anusvāra* are sounds which do not form syllables, so they are not the main building material of the visual form and interchanges between them are not regarded as a mistake in the *bandha*'s pattern. In this case, however, the entire syllable has changed. Doubling or reducing the consonant is also not uncommon in Sanskrit texts. In the above example the consonant has been reduced, and consequently, *ttam* from the answer to the ninth question has been replaced in the stanza by *tah*.

¹⁹ To the best of my knowledge this term has not been recorded in Sanskrit dictionaries. The context suggests that it denotes a particular bird species. The most congenial name in this case seems to be *karaka*. Nevertheless, neither Monier-Williams nor Apte make precise what kind of a bird in particular the word refers to (see Monier-Williams 2005: 254, Apte 1893: 379).

²⁰ All the illustrations were made by Justyna Niedbała and Hermína Cielas.

The construction of the figure meets the indications of the four spokes wheel pattern given for example in the *alaṃkāra* section of the *Agnipurāṇa* (7.43–45²¹)—the first half of the stanza creates the spokes, while the rim consists of the syllables of its second half.²² Apart from one of the fragments (asking for the vocative form of the name of one of the wheel’s parts) the content of the original stanzas is not related to the shape revealed as the final solution of the riddle. The relation between the *bandha*’s components—its semantic, visual and sonic layers—is, therefore, not very strong. Dharmadāsa created a complex conundrum which stepped away from the model of an ideal *citrabandha* for the sake of the puzzle itself, sacrificing the artistic value.

Moreover, with the subsequent *bandhas* the author was getting more and more innovative and moving away from the rules concerning the construction of visual stanzas described in normative texts. Dharmadāsa still combined *bandhas* with *praśnottaras* but in addition he changed the pattern and character of visual figures. Pictures were hidden not in a full stanza, like in the previous example, but in the base-words which were the source of answers and did not constitute a full stanza. They are connected only by having a common part. This kind of compositional approach has been exploited by Dharmadāsa, for example in stanza 3.16:

*kutaḥ kaḥ syāt kīḍṛk kathaya viṣavaidyāḥ sphuṭam idaṃ
ripoḥ kaḥ kīḍṛkṣo bhavati vaśagaḥ kaś ca kalabhāḥ |
pravīṇaḥ sambodhyaḥ subhaga vada kau ratnav-
acanaḥ surūpe vikhyātīm jagati mahatīm kā gatavatī || VMM 3.16*

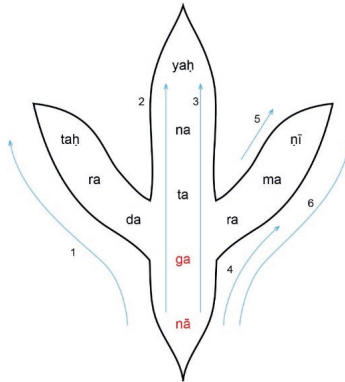
²¹ The numeration of stanzas according to *The Alaṃkāra-Section of the Agni-Purāṇa* by Bhattacharyya (Bhattacharyya 1976).

²² The method of constructing this particular visual formation has been presented as well by Dharmadāsa in the stanza preceding the example of the figure:

*catvāry arāṇi pādābhyām nemiṃ pādadvayena ca |
likhitvā dakṣiṇāvartam cakram praśnam avehi me || VMM 3.10.*

1. Tell me, who, what like and what for should be the person treating the snake bites? 2. Who and of what kind is the one dependent on the enemy? 3. What is a young elephant? Oh beautiful! 4. Call the clever one! 5. Tell [me] what both a jewel and a speech are? 6. Who is the one who achieves great fame in the world in beauty?

Again, what we have in the stanza is a group of questions. By answering them we receive three words which are the basis for *kākapadabandha*—a visual formation resembling a crow’s foot. Ultimately, solving *praśnottara* gives six answers: 1. *nā-agada-rataḥ* (a man devoted to antidotes), 2. *nā-gata-nayaḥ* (a man devoid of prudent conduct), 3. *nāga-tanayaḥ* (an elephant’s offspring), 4. *nāgara* (oh Wise One!), 5. *maṇī* (an ornament), 6. *nāga-ramaṇī* (Nāga woman). Two syllables, *nāga*, occur in five out of six answers (nos. 1–4 and 6). The fifth answer, on the other hand, is connected to the last one through *maṇī*. There are more common parts between the above words, which finally allows to distinguish three basic phrases: *nāgadarataḥ*, *nāgatanayaḥ* and *nāgaramaṇī*, related by the *yamaka* at the beginning (the above-mentioned *nāga*). These two common syllables should be placed at the bottom of the image, while the others (three for each word) should create consecutive claws crowning the visual representation of a crow’s foot:



It is also characteristic of the stanza in question that it was built mostly (excluding the last one) from questions about the synonyms of particular words. Moreover, the answers are homonymous. Once again the author constructs a puzzle based on the knowledge in the field of lexicography. The character of the riddles suggests that the *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana* and similar works could also serve as a tool used to learn the language and broaden Sanskrit vocabulary of a practitioner.

Another figure connected by Dharmadāsa with *praśnottara* is *sarvatobhdara*, appearing in almost all works—both in poetry and in normative texts—containing elements of visual poetry. However, the literary magic square presented in the *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana* is very simplified. Although a complete riddle consists of two stanzas, a visual form built on the basis of keywords which provide the answers to questions is composed only of nine syllables. The *praśnottara* itself is ample—it is made up of nineteen questions:

*kaś tyāge dhātur uktas tava ripuhṛdi kā bhūṣaṇaṃ ke stanānām
ko duḥkhī kaś ca śabdo vadati vada śucaṃ kau ripū khyātavīryau |
śṛṅgārī kīdrśaḥ kā raṇaśirasi bhayād bhaṅgam āpnoti senā
ko dānārthābhīdhyāi śirasi śirasi kau yudhyataḥ saṃprahṛtya ||
kīdrk toyārthinī strī bhavati madakarah prāyaśaḥ ko durādhyah
kasmin mandāyate 'sau niyatam udupatiḥ preyaśī kā murāreḥ |
vikhyātau vāhanau kau druhiṇāmurabhidoh kīdrḡ ākheṭakastrī
kīdrṇ naiva acirābhā samiti gatabhayāḥ ke gatau kaś ca dhātuḥ ||
VMM 3.21–22*

1. What verbal stem is used in the act of abandonment? 2. What is in the heart of your enemy? 3. What are the breast decorations?
4. Of what kind is the one who is unhappy? 5. And tell [me] what word expresses the sorrow? 6. Which two enemies are known for heroism? 7. Of what kind is what is marked by the love mood?
8. Which army in the climactic moment of the battle is broken because of fear? 9. Which [verbal stem] denotes the transmission of goods? 10. What are the two [creatures] starting the fight head to head? 11. Who is a woman who wants water? 12. What is the usual cause of poor man's excitement? 13. Where does the moon

inevitably disappear? 14. Who is Viṣṇu's most beloved? 15. What are the two famous vehicles of Brahmā and Viṣṇu? 16. Of what kind is the woman-hunter? 17. What, indeed, is the lightning not like? 18. Who are the ones devoid of fear in battle? 19. What verbal stem [is used to express] the departure?

Although there are many questions, all the answers consist of no more than three syllables. Some of them are monosyllabic words or even single vowels: 1. *hā* (to leave, to depart), 2. *ārā* (a knife for tanning leather), 3. *hārāḥ* (necklaces), 4. *ahāvī* (devoid of charm), 5. *hā!* (an exclamation expressive of pain or anger), 6. *vī* (Śiva—*u* and Kāma—*i*), 7. *hāvī* (charming), 8. *vīrā* (devoid of heroism), 9. *rā* (to bestow), 10. *avī* (two rams), 11. *avīhā* (thirsty for water), 12. *rāḥ* (a wealth, gold), 13. *rāhau* (in the eclipse), 14. *ī* (Lakṣmī), 15. *vī* (birds), 16. *vīhā* (hungry for birds), 17. *vīrā* (devoid of water),²³ 18. *vīrāḥ* (heroes), 19. *hā* (to leave, to depart).

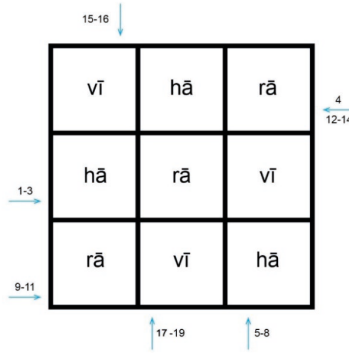
At first glance, the link between the above answers is noticeable. They all originated from the syllables *hā*, *rā* and *vī* or their parts connected in different configurations. These three syllables supposed to create the literary magic square. In a short instruction Dharmadāsa explains that his *sarvatobhadra* should be created by the means of “one syllable, two or all, moving in all directions”.²⁴ Moreover, the author refers to the figure using the term *duṣkara*, ‘difficult to compose’, which brings to mind Daṇḍin's discourse on *alaṃkāras* containing elements of visual poetry.²⁵ However, the literary magic square proposed

²³ The lightning is not devoid of water because of the direct connection with the cloud that is built of it.

²⁴ VMM 3.20: *varṣeṇa ekena ca dvābhyāṃ sarvair vā sarvadiggataiḥ uttaram sarvatobhadraṃ duṣkaram tad idam ||*

²⁵ Daṇḍin does not speak specifically about *citra* in the context of kinds of poetry or poetical embellishments. Nevertheless, among *alaṃkāras* he mentions a figure with the subtypes which are unambiguously classified as characteristic of *citra-bandha* by later theoreticians. In the third chapter of the *Kāvyaadarśa*, after a detailed discussion on *yamakas*, the author proceeds to figures of a more complex structure which he defines as *duṣkara*. He lists among them *gomūtrikā*, “having the characteristics of a cow's urine”, *ardhabhrāma*, “circulating in half”, *sarvatobhadra* and

by Dharmadāsa seems to be adapted to the rest of the riddle in an artificial, stilted way. There is no specific pattern of movement within the *sarvatobhadra*, which is one of the main features of the figure. The arrangement of syllables seems to be accidental. The only preserved rule is the composition of a magic square in which we obtain the same text on all sides. However, not all of the directions generate answers to the questions contained in *praśnottara*. While some of the triads of syllables contain answers to several questions, others have not been used at all. It is visible in the following diagram showing in which lines the answers to individual questions can be found:



niyama, ‘the limitation’. In numerous translations and works on the *Kāvyaḍarśa* the classification of these forms as *duṣkara* has been omitted. This is most probably due to the construction of the text which does not directly present *duṣkara* as a name of the group of poetic figures, as a class of *alaṃkāras* built according to the same principle. The term *duṣkara* was considered an adjective. The discussed term appears in the third chapter of the *Kāvyaḍarśa* three times: 1. at the beginning of the discourse on this type of forms, which starts with the definition of *gomūtrikā*; 2. in the description of *niyama* occurring in the later part of the chapter; 3. in a sentence summarizing Daṇḍin’s views on the topic in question, saying that *iti duṣkaramārge ‘pi kaścid ādarśataḥ kramah*—“thus has been presented a sequence [of figures] within the range of *duṣkara*”. Although *duṣkara*’s literal meaning—‘difficult to compose/to achieve/to create’—is correct, it should be acknowledged that in the *Kāvyaḍarśa* it is most probably a technical term, not an adjective. It results from the structure of the text, as well as from the tradition of such understanding of *duṣkara* in the context of Sanskrit visual poetry.

Dharmadāsa's *sarvatobhadra* was composed using the minimal number of syllables. The figure is definitely not refined; as if the author decided to use the idea of a literary magical square but, ultimately, the implementation of the project was not successful. Among the *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana*'s riddles containing visual elements, the above-described example is probably the furthest from the borders of *citrakāvya* defined by Sanskrit theoreticians due to violation of almost all the rules stipulating the composition of *sarvatobhadra*.

The last visual figure occurring in *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana* is the *nāgapāśaka*, a pattern of serpentine coils, sometimes mentioned as one of the subtypes of *nāgabandha*—the snake's coils pattern.²⁶ Dharmadāsa presented two examples of this form, both similar to each other. In the first *nāgapāśaka praśnottara* consists of three questions:

goṣṭhī vidagdhanavaty api śocanīyā kīdṛg bhavet taraṇiraśmiṣu
kā sadāsti |
durvārādarpadalitāmaranāyakāpi kīdṛśy akāri suraśatrucaṁmūr
guhena || VMM 3.47

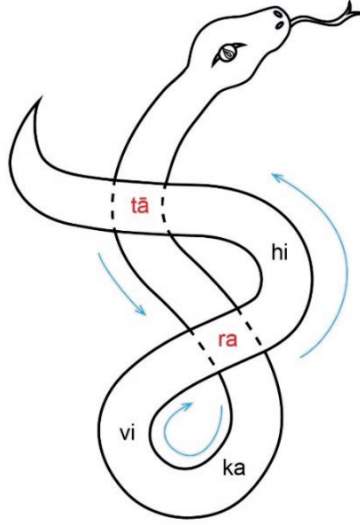
1. What assembly of wise men would be regrettable? 2. What is always in the rays of the sun? 3. Of what kind did Skanda make the troops of the enemies of the celestial army, which even defeated Indra's unstoppable pride?

²⁶ The stanza described has been mentioned, among others, as the example of one of the twelve kinds of snake's coils pattern in Balasubramanyan's recent compilation of *bandhas* (Balasubramanyan 2010: 256). In his recent article Alessandro Battistini argues that *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana*'s stanzas 3.47–48 (wrongly marked as VMM 3.51–52) “are NOT a *nāgabandha*” (Battistini 2016: 25), contrary to the view expressed by M. B. Emeneau. As the evidence Battistini quotes the definition of *nāgapāśaka* given by Viśveśvara in the *Kavīndrakarṇābharaṇa*. It states that the figure belongs to the group of word games based on the combination of several syllables which read in different configurations provide answers to several questions at the same time. Viśveśvara's definition does not refer to the possible visual character of *nāgapāśaka*. Nevertheless, the example given by Dharmadāsa and the author's explanation of the figure, as will be described below, justify the acceptance of *nāgapāśaka* as a simplified form of *nāgabandha*.

The answers for the above questions are: 1. *kavirahitā* (devoid of poets), 2. *ravikaratā* (the sun's radiance) and 3. *tāarakavirahitā* (devoid of Tāraka)²⁷. The relationship between individual words is clearly visible. In this case the external syllables in the base word—which is also the answer to the third question—are removed to create two first answers. While this form is clear from a technical point of view, it is difficult to find a complicated pattern of snake's coils in it. The various forms of the serpentine figure appearing in Sanskrit literature in many shapes are usually made of a large number of syllables. Additionally, the patterns of syllabic repetitions are strictly determined and complicated.²⁸ It is hard to imagine a complex pattern with numerous alliterations built of five syllables. The only possible visualization of the image suggested by the name of the figure was based on the keyword and is very basic, deviating significantly from the examples of snake's coils patterns known from Sanskrit visual poetry:

²⁷ The purpose of Skanda's birth was to defeat the demon Tāraka who was threatening the world.

²⁸ In its visual representation the text of the serpentine stanza can be read by following individual syllables that create a snake's body from head to tail. Subsequent fragments of the snake's body overlap, creating a specific pattern. Since each syllable located at the place of bend and the intersection of the coils is read a second time, the scheme requires the use of a complex and well-defined alliteration from the poet. In later Sanskrit literature, among the explanatory portions of the texts analyzing the nature of visual poetry, one can also find instructions for creating the *nāgabandha* pattern. Recommendations referring to the ways of composing this particular type of snake pattern can be found for example in the *Ratnāpaṇa* (ca. 15th century), Kumārasvāmin's commentary to the Vidyānātha's *Pratāparudrīya* (ca. 13th–14th century). The Kumārasvāmin's description is strictly technical and detailed. Interestingly, this commentary most likely refers to the oldest preserved example of *nāgabandha* in Sanskrit literature (PR 7.12). The *nāgabandha* pattern seems to be relatively late in Sanskrit visual poetry. It cannot be excluded that the earlier, far less complicated *nāgapāśaka* served as the inspiration for the poets who decided to exploit one more pattern and created a very complex visual enigma.



A short explanation of the form given by the author in the *Vidagdha-mukhaṃaṇḍana* reads *granthimān nāgapāśakaḥ*, “the snake’s coil is knotty” (VMM 3.46), and it does not provide much information about the figure. However, it has been extended in a commentary saying that *yasmin nāgapāśabandhe granthir badhyate saḥ granthimān* (...) *pāśabandha eva nāgapāśakaḥ praśnottaram*, “knotty/having a node is the one in which a knot is formed in the snake’s coils pattern (...) The coils pattern is indeed the snake’s coil, question-answer-like” (VMM 3.46, commentary). The *pāśabandha* should be understood, therefore, as *nāgapāśaka*, the snake’s coils pattern. This explanation suggests the presence of the image and the fact that in the author’s opinion it should be classified within *bandhas*. Nonetheless, in the case of Dharmadāsa’s serpentine figure it is difficult to speak of the pattern. The rules governing the composition of the snake’s coils image were neglected to such a degree that the only trace suggesting which visual form has been hidden in the text is expressed by the author,

who calls it *nāgapāśaka*. Without this information it would be impossible to identify the pattern. Although it is not similar to the complex *nāgabandha* form, it also uses a simplified visual element in the shape of serpentine coils.

Dharmadāsa poses a challenge and moves far away from the borders of the theory of *citrakāvya*. The author's modifications are so complex and profound that they call into question the occurrence of *bandha* forms in the text, at least in some of the examples.²⁹ Moreover, by creating complex enigmas, the author pushed their receivers' minds to the limits—he forced them to unveil multiple layers, denotations and connotations in the text. The readers/listeners had to stretch their abilities to solve the riddles set by the author and to cross the borders of their mental skills. Reading visual poems is not an easy task, since the act of reading itself is by necessity selective.³⁰ Human's mind is not able to decode simultaneously the sonic, verbal and pictorial layers of a text. Dharmadāsa made an effort to make it even more difficult, helping to develop mental abilities and elementary cognitive processes, such as focusing attention, perception and memory. The *citrabandhas* from the *Vidagdhamukhamāṇḍana* of Dharmadāsa do not represent a great artistic value but it was not the author's goal—he aimed at creating something new, something challenging for those people who had a great knowledge of Sanskrit, figures of speech and classical *bandha* forms known from the works of theoreticians. Although lacking in poetical charm and sometimes questionable because of the level of modifications introduced by the author, this kind of pictorial compositions plays an important role in the history and development of Sanskrit visual poetry and for sure is puzzling and astonishing in accordance with the meaning of *citra*.

²⁹ This view is expressed for example by Dr. R. Ganesh, a contemporary Sanskrit poet from Bangalore. According to his opinion, in none of the riddles proposed by Dharmadāsa can proper *citrabandhas* be found (based on personal communication by Dr. R. Ganesh, 2016).

³⁰ For more information on the physiology of reading visual poetry please consult Gross 2007.

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